

APPENDIX H

**NATIVE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN
CASCADE COUNTY AND THE GREAT FALLS
AREA DURING THE HISTORIC PERIOD**

Native American Presence in Cascade County and the Great Falls Area During the Historic Period

When Captains Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery arrived at the Great Falls of the Missouri River in the summer of 1805, the area had already been mapped by fur traders. Fur trade era documents offer great insight into how and when the Blackfeet utilized their territory (Matthews 2006). It is widely accepted that the Piegan clan of the Blackfeet Tribe controlled north-central Montana east of the continental divide (Toole 1959). The Piegans asserted a strong presence in central Montana and in 1805 the area they considered theirs ranged from the southern Saskatchewan and Alberta plains south to the Yellowstone River. “War parties” of Piegans frequently patrolled these rich plains from Saskatchewan to the Yellowstone River, ensuring that everyone knew this territory and the game that lived thereon was theirs. The area around the Great Falls of the Missouri was without a doubt Blackfeet country (Malone, et al. 1991).

On 13 June 1805 while surveying the rolling hills along the banks of the Missouri River, Captain Meriwether Lewis came upon the Great Falls of the Missouri (Duncan and Burns 1997). During the Corps of Discovery’s one-month portage around the Great Falls of the Missouri (13 June to 13 July 1805), Lewis and Clark’s journal entries for this period do not contain any reference of having sighted the remnants of Indian lodging (DeVoto 1953). Given how detailed their journal entries typically were, if Lewis and Clark had encountered any sign of Blackfeet, their camps or dwellings during their Great Falls portage, they would certainly have made note of it. The most likely explanation for the lack of any such journal entry is that the proposed location for the Highwood Generating Station did not represent a suitable location for a Piegan encampment. It was somewhat deficient in the essential attributes of a Piegan encampment, namely water, abundant fish and wild game, protection from the elements, and fuel. Therefore, for all intents and purposes, the specific proposed location (Salem site) of the HGS was controlled and utilized occasionally – but most likely not inhabited – by the Piegans.

The Blackfeet Indian’s preferred area for establishing encampments was in present day Glacier County on the eastern boundary of Glacier National Park (Travel Montana 2006). However, their general presence along the Missouri River in the area of Great Falls is attested to by the fact that immediately after the portage, on 13 July 2005, soon after departing from White Bear Island – about 22 miles to the southwest of Belt Creek – the expedition found remnants of a Blackfeet encampment. It was a large, circular lodge framed by cottonwood poles and some 216 feet in circumference at the base (Moulton 2004).

The Blackfeet were a mobile people who moved around seasonally to harvest game and plants when needed and when in season. The area in and around Glacier National Park was utilized in a seasonal manner for food, materials necessary for survival, and ceremonial purposes, but the rest of the territory was utilized extensively as well. However, sometimes this use did not leave behind material evidence or was not recognized by people unfamiliar with the Blackfeet type of settlement. This would explain why Lewis and Clark did not mention encampments. Also most encampments would have been on bench overlooking the Missouri River. Coulees in the vicinity of the Great Falls of the Missouri River may have also been used as kill sites, since bison

were plentiful in the area as well as deer, elk, antelope, and other targeted game. Ethnographic evidence also tells of the area of the HGS having been used as a cache site when "war parties" were in the field. After a series of treaties and executive orders the aboriginal territory of the Blackfeet was either ceded by them or taken by executive action leaving the reservation boundaries in their present state (Matthews 2006).

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